

# RI Pre-K COVID-19 Re-Opening Guidance

## Introduction

The RI Pre-K is an integral part of RI's Preschool-12th grade educational system and has a goal to begin school, in person, on August 31, 2020. RI Pre-K Programs, which reside in Community Based Childcare Organizations, Head Start Programs and Public School Districts, will need to exercise additional precautions to protect the health and safety of the children, families, staff and community members to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Because of the unique program and delivery method within RI Pre-K, we realize that there is relevant guidance available from RIDE, DHS and DOH that may apply to your particular program. The purpose of this document is to guide RI Pre-K programs and classrooms in their decision making around COVID 19 and school re-entry. All of the guidance in this document is supported by best practice in early childhood education. Throughout the document there will be some pieces that are mandated for all RI Pre-K providers, regardless of delivery method, along with suggestions and things to consider as you build your plans.

The core principles for this process are to provide the highest quality educational and instructional experiences for all children, implement the proper procedures to ensure the health and safety for our students, staff, families and community, while acknowledging and preparing for the unknown that accompanies the COVID-19 pandemic. This document may also serve as a resource for any LEA preschool or Pre-K program who wishes to use it.

Within this document we will be referencing all three possible re-entry scenarios.

- 100% in person learning
- A hybrid model with some in-person and some distance learning
- 100% distance learning

## Physical Space and Occupancy

RI Pre-K enrollment must be carried out in stable groups or pods of no more than twenty (20) children. The maximum number of people per classroom is twenty (20) or fewer, this number does not include the stable teachers and regular classroom staff. Preschool special education classrooms must continue to meet the class size and ratio requirements in the RI Regulations Governing the Education of Children with Disabilities.

All other staff that must enter the room will be treated as visitors and must follow the visitor's protocols established by the program or district. When possible, it is recommended that visitors and non-classroom staff minimize disruptions to the stable group or pod.



## *Ratios, Stable Groups, and Pods*

- “Stable groups” or Pods, means that the same individuals, children and teachers are in the same group each day.
  - Children shall not change from one group to another.
  - Stable groups/Pods must occupy the same classroom space each day.
- If more than one (1) group of children is cared for at one (1) facility, each group shall be in a separate room. Groups shall not mix with one another at any point in the day.
  - Schools/Providers may not create or add new half walls, dividers, or partitions to increase capacity in a classroom.
- Program leadership that are not in the stable group of children, will not count in the staff/child ratios.
- There are no exceptions to staff/child ratio during the COVID-19 crisis.
- If programs intend to use classrooms for more than one stable pod, for example, using an RI Pre-K room as an afterschool classroom with different children, they will need to provide information on the cleaning protocol they will be following between the two sessions.
- Consideration must be given to compliance with LRE requirements, relative to preschoolers with disabilities.

## *Social Distancing Measures*

- The CDC has published the following social distancing guidance: [CDC Social Distancing](#).
- The ability to understand and comply with the principle of social and physical distancing is highly age dependent. It is unreasonable to expect young children to understand this concept.
- RI Pre-K programs should use their judgment in establishing age-appropriate classroom routines that incorporate distancing and reducing the number of shared play items and educational materials.

## *Classroom Best Practice*

All RI Pre-K classrooms must have established cleaning, screening, face mask, quarantining, communications, and other COVID-19 response procedures planned and implemented prior to opening. This document is aligned to the [RIDE-issued back-to-school guidance](#).

## *General COVID-19 Guidance for RI Pre-K*

- Included in the plan for 100% in-person and the hybrid model should be a way to immediately remove from the classroom any toy or item that has been placed in a child’s mouth, sneezed on or picked up with dirty hands, until that toy has been cleaned and sanitized.
- ECERS-3 – remember your ECERS training. The more multiple materials that you have within the classroom the less children will have to share, thereby limiting that number of germs they are coming in contact with throughout the day. Materials should be ample with duplicates of favorite items.
- Quality – Regardless of setting, RI Pre-K classrooms must maintain the high expectations and benchmarks associated with being an RI Pre-K provider. Delivering the highest quality of education to all children and families must not be comprised as a result of COVID19 restrictions. While components of RI Pre-K will look different the dedication of the educational staff to building relationships, supporting social and emotional

development, implementing HQ curriculum, having robust formative assessment practices and creating a positive, engaging and play forward environment.

- Monitoring – Until a decision is made regarding classroom observations and monitoring this fall RI Pre-K programs should anticipate monitoring practices to continue as planned. If children are in classrooms the expectation is that they are receiving a high-quality education in an appropriate early learning environment demonstrated through observation and monitoring.
- Stable Pods for Safety – both DHS and RIDE guidance call for stable pods. For RI Pre-K this simply means to remain in your classrooms with the same teachers throughout the course of the day. Whenever possible limit visitors to the classroom. Try to keep the same people covering breaks as needed. Visitors should wear masks while they are in the room if they are not part of the stable pod.
- Outside Time – Children still need a significant amount of time outdoors for gross motor play. During the COVID-19 crisis, only one pod/classroom of children may be on the playground at any given time. Surfaces such as slides, handlebars of trikes and/or climbing equipment must be disinfected after each pod's use. More than one pod may be permitted on a playground providing that the two pods are separated by a barrier and can maintain a minimum of 14 feet between each pod and pods do not overlap.

## *Enhanced Cleaning and/or Disinfecting Procedures*

Cleaning refers to the removal of germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces. Although not designed to kill germs but instead remove them from a surface, most cleaning products can "kill" coronaviruses by removing the fatty outer layer they use to infect cells.

Disinfecting refers to using a chemical designed to kill germs on surfaces. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing any remaining germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection. The CDC recommends cleaning surfaces with soap and then applying disinfectant.

## *Recommended Disinfection Solutions*

Consistent cleaning, disinfecting, and ventilation practices reduce the potential transmission of the virus. A full list of EPA's approved disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) can be found at [EPA Approved Disinfectants](#).

During the COVID-19 crisis, programs shall adhere to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) guidelines](#) for cleaning and sanitizing.

More aggressive cleaning routines are required to ensure a safe return to school for all.

- Outdoor shared places, such as playgrounds, can be used with a cleaning and sanitization plan. All outdoor toys and playground equipment must be cleaned and sanitized between uses of different "stable" groups or pods. Regulatory guidelines regarding group size during COVID-19 apply to outdoor play time.
- If programs intend to use classrooms for more than one stable pod, for example, using an RI Pre-K room as a school age room after RI Pre-K operating hours have ended, they will need to provide information on the cleaning protocol they will be following between the two sessions.

- For shared bathrooms for different classrooms: if possible, identify two stalls for one group and two for another. If there is no way to establish separate use, ensure frequent cleaning of the entire bathroom throughout the day. Provide and post a cleaning schedule.
- RIDOH requires that employers ensure that employees, customers, and visitors have access to soap and water and/or hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol at all times.
- Cleaning and sanitizing plans and schedules must be posted throughout the space and closely monitored.
- Surfaces that are frequently touched throughout the day must be cleaned, sanitized, and disinfected multiple times per day, especially after drop off and transition times. Coronavirus can survive on hard surfaces from hours to days.
  - Doorknobs, desks/tables, chairs, sinks, indoor and outdoor play equipment, etc.
- As it is more difficult to clean, sanitize, and disinfect porous surfaces (i.e., soft or plush materials), schools are advised to avoid using these items within classroom play areas or have a daily cleaning plan.
  - Examples include non-vinyl bean bag chairs, doll clothes and stuffed animals.
- Rugs do not need to be removed but must be included in the daily cleaning and disinfecting procedures.
- Ideally, frequently shared materials, such as scissors, crayons and writing implements, will be available for each individual child in a separate container. At a minimum, those items would be purchased in larger quantities, to minimize sharing and must be cleaned and disinfected if used between different groups or pods.

## *Handwashing Procedures*

- Schools must ensure that employees, students, and visitors have access to soap and water and/or hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol at all times.
- Appropriate and frequent handwashing must be practiced with children and incorporated into the daily routine.
- Gloves are not required, except for custodial staff, or in situations where more protective equipment is needed.

## *Entry Screening Procedures*

Until further notice, RI Pre-K students will no longer be dropped off or picked up inside the classroom. Children should be dropped off by a parent or guardian in a designated spot, preferably outside when possible, where screening will take place or be verified. This means we need to strengthen other methods of communicating with families. Seeing parents and guardians twice a day is what helps build relationships and family engagement. Without daily face-to-face contact we need to be more diligent than ever in providing information to families about their children's progress and updates regarding the program.

- Exclude people with COVID-19 symptoms if they can't be explained by allergies or another non-infectious cause, as listed in the [CDC COVID-19 Symptoms](#) document.
- If an employee or child is identified, pursuant to screening or otherwise, as having acute respiratory illness symptoms or is positive for any other COVID-19 risk factors, or is currently directed to be in quarantine or



isolation, the provider shall send the employee or child home and take any additional necessary and appropriate action, in accordance with applicable laws and current RIDOH guidance.

- Providers may also choose to supplement screening questions with temperature checks. CDC guidance on temperature checks can be found in the [CDC COVID-19 FAQ](#).
- Programs may also choose to screen visitors in the same manner as employees.
- Programs must share resources and have regular communication with families regarding when to keep children home and when there is a possibility of exposure.
- Programs and schools will identify staff who will be visible and present at drop off to ensure compliance with screening procedures.

## Attendance

RI Pre-K will adhere to the established attendance policy. This policy allows for 20 unexcused absences within a school year. Excused absences do not count towards that number. Excused absences have been widened to include any COVID related absence due to mandated quarantine, self-quarantine and/or medically related concern that prevents a child from attending school during a rise in cases. Attendance in all delivery models will be recorded on the attendance sheet and uploaded to ECEDS by the 5<sup>th</sup> of each month.

### *RI Pre-K 100% In-Person*

Attendance will be taken per usual, reported monthly on the attendance form and uploaded into ECEDs by the 5<sup>th</sup> of each month.

### *RI Pre-K Hybrid Model*

Children who are learning virtually due to the hybrid model still count in classroom attendance. The expectation for what that looks like will be adapted based individual programs.

### *RI Pre-K Distance Learning*

Attendance for virtual learning will use teacher check in's with families, submitted work, such as art projects and videos, and/or participation in on-line classrooms such as google hangouts.

## Procedures for Visitors

Visitors should be discouraged from visiting RI Pre-K classrooms during the COVID-19 crisis to limit possible exposure to the children and staff.

- Any individual who must visit, shall verbally complete the self-attestation form for the purpose of screening for symptoms of COVID-19.



- Any individual who must visit, shall document their arrival, departure time and contact information on a visitor log that must be kept onsite and available.
- Visitors are required to wear face coverings unless the visitor can easily, continuously, and measurably maintain at least six (6) feet of distance from other employees and/or visitors for the duration of his or her work and/or time in a building.

## Face Masks and Other Personal Protective Equipment

- Classroom staff are required to wear a mask even within their stable classroom setting with a stable group or pod.
- During the COVID-19 crisis, all adults (visitors, non-teaching staff) shall wear a mask or face covering while in the program.
- Masks and face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.
  - Masks and face coverings may be used if tolerated by children older than 2. However, wearing masks or face coverings for long periods of time is uncomfortable and could hamper speech and social development.
  - As masks and face coverings are not recommended when children are at home with family members, it is reasonable to not require them, even of older children, in classrooms when interactions are limited to only children and adults in the stable group or pod.
  - Masks and face coverings should be considered for children older than 2, as tolerated, in common areas of the building and at drop off and pick up times when there may be some unavoidable close interaction between the stable groups.

## Communication Procedures

RI Pre-K can support the school community by sharing age appropriate resources with students, and having regular communication with families, and staff. Coordinate with local health officials to determine what type of information might be best to share with the school community.

- Continue to message the importance of employees staying home if they are sick.
- Continue to message the importance of children staying home if they are sick.
- Coordinate with local health officials to communicate dismissal decisions and the possible COVID-19 exposure.
- Align the communication plan to incorporate the entire school community.
- Translate information in the languages most prevalent in your community.
- Maintain confidentiality of students and staff members, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act.



- RI Pre-K programs must immediately contact the RIDE RI Pre-K team if a student, staff, or any member of the family household has been instructed to isolate or quarantine due to having contracted or been exposed to COVID-19.

Please visit the general CDC fact sheets and resources below to help staff and families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves, children and the community.

- [What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stop the spread of germs poster](#)
- [COVID-19 and children](#)

## Maintain Day to Day Procedures

During the COVID-19 crisis, RI Pre-K programs will maintain their approved protocols and procedures for the following activities that adheres to CDC guidelines.

- Adhere to all child and staff illness policies.
- Drop-off and pick-up procedures that adhere to social distancing guidelines and include screening staff, families, and children upon arrival each day.
- Hand washing guidelines for staff and children and a plan to adhere to these guidelines.
- Staff plan with a protocol for monitoring absenteeism and securing appropriate substitutes.
- Plan for daily gross motor play for stable groups utilizing outdoor spaces in adherence to all guidelines.
- Provide snacks and meals in classrooms adhering to all CACFP and CDC guidelines.

## Personnel Procedures

- Each organization should have a plan to ensure that employees who are required to isolate based on a positive test for COVID-19 or are required to quarantine as a result of exposure, can safely stay out of the workplace until cleared to return.
- RI Pre-K programs must have substitute teacher policies and procedures that support the additional precautions outlined within this document.

## *Training Plan to Meet Safety Guidelines*

As noted in the adopted 2020-2021 state calendar, RI Pre-K programs have identified Professional Development days within the year. Whenever possible, all staff trainings, professional development opportunities, technical assistance and RI Pre-K gatherings will be conducted virtually.



- RI Pre-K programs are required to have their staff complete the online health and safety trainings for delivering care during COVID-19. These modules were developed in partnership between the Center for Early Learning Professionals and DHS can be accessed at [CELP COVID-19 Trainings](#).

## Education Considerations

RI Pre-K programs must ensure the continuity of education, curriculum implementation and instruction, and related educational supports for all students. Re-opening plans should account for the continuity of teaching and learning, incorporating comparable levels between online and in-person instruction, when feasible and appropriate.

### *RI Pre-K 100% In-Person*

Staff must ensure that all learning centers and play areas are open at all times to reduce the number of children in any given area. Each classroom must have a way for managing the number of children allowed in any one area and take into account the materials accessible to each child.

Whole group activities where children sit in close proximity, such as circle time, should not be held. While stable groups do not always need to maintain a 6ft distance from other in their group best practice dictates that we try to give as much space as possible. Sitting children on a rug in a circle does not allow for any separation. Pieces of your routine such as morning meeting can be done in smaller groups as a center activity. This is also best practice from ECERS. Children learn best from doing rather than watching. Engaging whole groups often results in more time disciplining children for not sitting properly than it does on the activity itself.

Considerations for meal and snack times should be carefully planned. Snacks and meals should be offered in the classroom and adhere to all CACFP and CDC guidelines. Children should be seated safely facing one direction and not across from each other. This may mean tables and seats have to be arranged in a different configuration and may take longer to prepare. RI Pre-K classrooms should continue to gather together for meal and snack times. Sharing and enjoying meals together is an important social time for young children and should continue to be an opportunity to strengthen relationships, experience new foods and learn about each other.

### *RI Pre-K Hybrid Model*

At this time RI Pre-K does not have a hybrid model plan. Many districts are planning for hybrid instruction due to transportation issues. RI Pre-K does not provide transportation so, at this time, there is no reason all children can't come to school each day. In the event of a rise in COVID 19 cases, in conjunction with direction from RIDOH, if the ratios allowed for in-person decrease then we will support you in adapting to a hybrid model.

If you are a classroom in a district building that is doing a hybrid model, please reach out to us directly so we can determine the best course of action.

### *RI Pre-K Distance Learning*





Whenever possible, and if allowed, a teacher should do any live teaching or recorded segments from the classroom. This will help children in making a stronger connection between virtual learning and their school. Routines such as feeding the fish or watering the plants will help ease children's fears around what is happening at their school while they are away.

In addition to continuous education, comprehensive re-opening plans should include procedures for ensuring food security, and access to social services and community resources. RI Pre-K programs should consider the following when designing their re-opening distance learning plans.

- How to provide feasible and appropriate distance learning for children?
- How to provide educational supports for children with identified needs?
- What training and support do teachers need to implement distance learning?
- How will technical issues for families, students and staff be addressed?
- The potential lack of access to computers and the Internet for students at home.
- Ways to distribute food to students when in person school is not available.
- Alternatives for providing essential social services for students and families.

## Child Outreach Screening

Child Outreach Screening continues to be an affirmative and continuing obligation of each LEA and an important component in the Child Find process. Due to the ongoing health concerns relative to the pandemic, RIDE and RIDOH recognize that Child Outreach personnel may not be able to screen children in person, due to LEA or childcare policies and protocols. To meet ongoing requirements and to ensure that children that require further evaluation are identified, Child Outreach Screening will be able to be completed virtually, through parent questionnaire. LEAs will make decisions between in-person screenings and virtual screenings, based on current state health guidelines, as well as district and program policy. Regardless of whether screenings are done in person or virtually, the collaboration between the Child Outreach Teams and the EC programs will continue to be critical.

## Special Education and Related Services

LEAs are required to continue to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to students with disabilities and to meet all federal and state requirements. In the re-opening plans, districts will need to consider not only the preschoolers serviced within their schools, but the students in RI Pre-K and other early care and education

programs in the community. Individualized services are determined at IEP meetings with the mandated team members, including parents and can include options from full in-person special education and related service to full distance-learning. Districts are encouraged to continue working closely with families and early childhood programs to meet the individual needs of their students.

Special Education services for all RI Pre-K students must still be provided per a child's IEP. If it is unrealistic for the itinerant to provide services in a safe way a program may choose a space outside the classroom for the itinerant to conduct services. That area must be cleaned after each use per posted cleaning protocol. For example, a speech therapist may be unable to provide services while wearing a mask. They could, however, provide services in a more controlled environment within the building where they can ensure 6 ft of separation or could conduct services virtually. RI Pre-K is still supporting the Itinerant Model in all classrooms. Teachers should have a planning matrix for each child and access to collaborative meetings on a regular basis.

## Classroom Supplies

RI Pre-K programs should develop a plan for sourcing and maintaining any and all additional supplies needed to continue safe operations during the COVID-19 crisis.

*Supplies **required** for all organizations:*

- Face masks (cloth or surgical face masks are acceptable.)
- EPA-approved disinfectant solutions or other general cleaning supplies (spray bottles, bleach, surface cleaners, etc.)
- Materials for hand washing stations (soap and water) and/or hand sanitizer bottles at workstations.
- Regular health and wellness materials included in a first aid kit.

*Suggested, **not required**, supplies include:*

- Disinfectant wipe stations near communal objects.
- Forehead thermometers are not a requirement.

Additionally, other supplies may be needed as documented by the [CDC Guidance](#).

## Compliance

- All RI Pre-K programs must complete a COVID-19 Plan, either through DHS or LEAs, in advance of reopening to demonstrate understanding and provide assurances to the guidance provided in this document.
- All RI Pre-K programs are expected to post their COVID-19 Plans, so they are visible to staff, families and visitors.
- At any point, RIDE may ask for further documentation or evidence to support COVID-19 plans within RI Pre-K programs.



## RIDE Contacts

For further information regarding RI Pre-K and LEA Preschool guidance during the COVID-19 crisis, please contact the RIDE personnel listed below.

For questions pertaining to RI Pre-K please contact the RI Pre-K Team at [RIPre-K@ride.ri.gov](mailto:RIPre-K@ride.ri.gov).

For questions pertaining to preschool special education please contact [ruth.gallucci@ride.ri.gov](mailto:ruth.gallucci@ride.ri.gov).

## Resource Links

- RIDE Back to School Guidance. [https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/COVID19/Back to School RI Guidance 6.19.20.pdf](https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/COVID19/Back_to_School_RI_Guidance_6.19.20.pdf)
- RIDE FAQ COVID19. <https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/COVID19/ReopeningFAQs.pdf>
- State Calendar 2020-2021. [https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/COVID19/2020-21 School Calendar 6.11.20.pdf](https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/COVID19/2020-21_School_Calendar_6.11.20.pdf)
- State Calendar FAQ. [https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/COVID19/RI School Calendar 2020-21 FAQ ENG 6.10.20.pdf](https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/COVID19/RI_School_Calendar_2020-21_FAQ_ENG_6.10.20.pdf)
- Re-Opening RI. <https://reopeningri.com/child-care-youth-activities>
- Child Care Response Playbook. [http://media.ride.ri.gov/EEIE/GuidanceSY20-21/Child-Care-Playbook-07172020\\_final.pdf](http://media.ride.ri.gov/EEIE/GuidanceSY20-21/Child-Care-Playbook-07172020_final.pdf)

